

A
LETTER
TO THE
DISSENTERS.

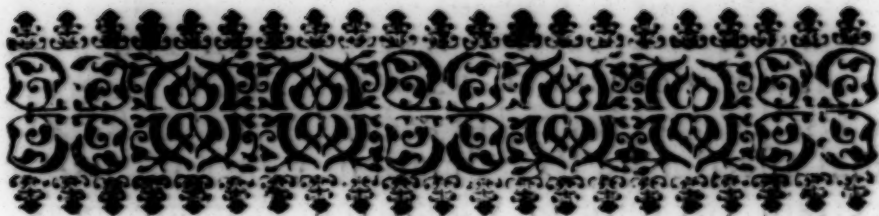


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A
L E T T E R
 TO THE
D I S S E N T E R S.



WHILE Words of Strife and Dreadful Reproaches are heard among the *Dissenters*, and even among their Ministers one against another, who, that has any sincere Affection to their Interest, would not throw Water upon this Fire?

I doubt not but every Christian will agree, that this is a Time when good Advice is as much wanted among the People I am speaking to, as ever it was since the Name of a *Dissenter* was known in *England*; But perhaps it may not be a Time when a Man giving Advice, however seasonable, however adapted to their Case, and however sincerely intending their Service and Advanrage, may be patiently heard. The Passions of Men

are none of their best Friends, and tho', when those Passions are most Violent, they stand at that Time in most need of Advice, it seems of all Times the most unseasonable to offer it. For it is great odds, but that, instead of accepting the most Cordial affectionate Expostulation, they will, like a certain Creature of whom the Scripture speaks in another case, *Turn again, and rend you.*

But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, *Who can withhold himself from speaking?* Or, as Mr. Bradbury well says in his late Answer, &c. *Who dare be silent,* whose Thoughts are charg'd with any thing that may be of use to put a stop to the dreadful Rage which is gone out among us?

Were the *Dissenters* a National Church, a Constituted Body built upon Fundamentals of Discipline establish'd by Law; and had they a Legal Judicature among them, by which they were oblig'd to regulate their Behaviour, and to whose Sentence they were oblig'd to submit; the present Affair would lye before them, and it would appear to be an Iniquity to be punished by the Judge.

But as there is no *Ecclesiastick* King, in our *Israel*, and that every Man among us has, as a certain Divine of the Church said lately, *a Supremacy in his own Breast*, and is allow'd by the Law to set up for himself what Form of Worship, and what Scheme of Belief he thinks fit: *I say*, since it is so, there remains nothing but Prayers and Tears to prevail with Christians, for the Honour of Religion, for the Glory of God, for their own Good, and for the sake of all about them, to consider what they are doing. How

How to direct even these Expostulations, so as they shall be accepted, how to cloth Words with such Energy, as to make Impressions on the Minds of those I am to speak to, and neither have the good Opinion of themselves, or the bad Opinion they may have of the adviser, obstruct the Influence they ought to have upon the Persons they are directed to, is the Case ; Be that how the Disposer of all Events shall please to direct ; The end is so Glorious, the design so Sincere, so Disinterested, and so truly affectionate to the *Dissenters*, and the Impulse so strong, be it from above or not, that the attempt must be made : What follows must be spoken ; those that reject it, reject not the Man, but the Means, let them do it at their Peril.

Sirs, I intreat you, stoop to a Voice without doors ; bear an humble Expostulation from a Heart unconcern'd in your Disputes ; But deeply concern'd for them ; submit to the Plainness of Truth, and the Justice of Argument, however Contemprible the Instrument ; you do not know, but the Spirit of God may speak in the Mouths of those you despise most : However, if there be nothing offer'd you can accept of, there shall be nothing offer'd you can except against, so you may receive it as you see fit.

I take no Part of the Question in hand here, I am of neither Side in the present Expostulation ; I distinguish greatly between the Question in Debate, and the Manner of Debating it : I bless God, I am not at a loss in the Question itself, if I were to meddle with it here ; and if all the *Ministers*

sters of the *Dissenters*, nay, all the Angels from Heaven, were to preach another Doctrine than that which the Scriptures of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has Taught me, and which I firmly believe I do rightly Understand ; *They shall be to me a Curse and accursed.*

But I have nothing to do, I say, with your Question here ; happy had it been for the *Dissenters*, had it not been named among you at all ; But it is the Manner of handling this Question, that is the Point. This is your Scandal, your Sin, and your Shame, and of this I must speak with you in Plainness and with Freedom.

I am answer'd, *I know*, even before I begin, by a Scripture Text, *Jude v. 3. Earnestly contend for the Faith* ; and I answer immediately in the words of that excellent Expositor, Mr. Henry upon this very Text,

Contend EARNESTLY for the Faith, but not ANGRILY.

Strangers who enquire after the Original of this unhappy Breach, ask it thus ; Who were They that quarrell'd in this violent and outrageous manner ? How came they to fall out to such a shameful degree ? The last part of the Question is answer'd by the Apostle, *Ja. 4. 1. From whence come Wars and Fightings among you ?* — But when I come to the first part, who the Persons were ? What can I answer, and what indeed can be said ? Are they our Ministers ! the Guides of Peace ! Servants of the God of Peace ! Preachers of the Gospel of Peace ! *Hinc illæ Lachrymæ !* is it possible ! can these Things be ! and who did they quarrel

rel with? Was it with one another! Dreadful Work!

I shall effectually convince you all, that this Letter is not written to Expose your Persons, or Distinguish your Conduct, I mean one from another; neither is it to dilate upon the Facts, which, as it would be on our Side only *renovare dolorem*, so it would be on your Side a Loading of Reproach; I say this Letter is not written to dilate upon the Facts, but to reason upon the Consequences; and in the humblest manner possible, to move every Side to put an End to a Breach, that will otherwise let in all your Enemies upon you in full Battalia; to quench a Fire, which, if not timely put out, will burn up the very name of the *Dissenters*, and even hazard the Overthrow of the Reformation in the World; and this by the Agency even of that very Body which we have alledged are the Strength and Perfection of the Reformation. In which, *tho' I point out no particular Side or Party*; yet, what I have to say is Personal, as to the People I direct it to, 'tis to the *Dissenters*, 'tis to them in Particular.

Sirs, for God's sake, what are ye doing? Whither are ye going? Who are ye setting Examples to? Who are ye Grieving, and who are ye making Glad? Who Sighs for the sad Event of these Things? And who Triumphs over you for them, as over a People whose Glory is departed, whose Temple is falling, and who, being thus divided among yourselves, *Cannot stand*? And what, I beseech you, will the End of all these Things be?

It were to be wish't the *Dissenters*, would consider the Interest of their whole Body with respect to the Laws they are subject to, the Government under which they live, and the People among whom they converse, to all which they have some relative Obligations, which are of great weight, and merit to be well Consider'd, and a due Regard to be had to every one of them, if they study their own Safety and Support, as well as their Reputation and Esteem : Nor will any wise Men, Loyal as the *Dissenters* are, put Weapons in the Hands of their Enemies, or by lessening their own Characters, and lessening the Esteem that the Government may now have of them, strengthen the Hands and the Arguments of those Persons, who on all Occasions endeavour to represent them as a People not deserving the Favours they receive, not fit to enjoy the Liberty and Toleration allow'd them ; Men of furious Tempers, such as are destructive of Religion in the World, and therefore not fit to be Tolerated on any account whatsoever.

I repeat it again; I do not speak now of the Doctrinal Points in which they have differ'd, 'tis none of my Business here, I avowedly put it out of the Question ; But I speak of the Temper spread abroad among good Men, the want of Charity, the want of a disposition to Peace, and the little moderation with which either Side have treated one another, and which still continues among them.

How shall we expect the Enemies of the *Dissenters* shall treat them, if they treat one another thus with Passion and Indecency ? What Arms do we put into the Hands of those who Envy the
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Dissenters their Liberty? Let one Consideration alone move us: Consider, Friends, the *TOLERATION*, reflect that by this very Strife the *Dissenters* are in part disabled, even in the Terms of that *Toleration*, and your Enemies say already, that one part of your Meeting-houses might be legally shut up: One would have thought that even this should have prevail'd with you to have differ'd with more Secrecy one with another, if such a Difference must have happen'd: I repeat the Advice again.

Consider the TOLERATION.

Consider that you enjoy the Toleration more by the good Disposition of your Princes since the Revolution, than from any Interest you had in the Inclination of the Persons, by the Majority of whose Suffrages you obtain'd it: The happy Circumstances which brought it to pass in Parliament, are more owing to the Politick Interests of the State, than the favour you have had among the Statesmen; and it has been of late particularly owing to the Wisdom and Justice of the King, that the Majority of the Legislature have been Influenced in your favour: How unhappy is the present Juncture then! and how much would it be Improv'd to your Disadvantage, had you now any new favour to expect! and how much may it still be so, *take it as it is*, that you should have this Breach in your Characters! this Scandal upon the Peaceableness of your Dispositions! this Blow to your Reputation, just when the King had the goodness to speak so many great Things for you from the Throne! and express so much Satisfaction in you, and in what had been done for you! do you think there

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can want Men at hand to represent these Things to his Majesty in the worst Colours, and by the worst light they can? Will there be wanting those who will, as Opportunity may present, ask the King this unhappy Question, *Are these the Men your Majesty had such an Opinion of? Do these Men deserve your Majesties Favour?* The *Dissenters*, in General, I hope, will in all Things preserve his Majesties good Opinion of them, and do their utmost to deserve his Favour. But sure this is not the way: Such Breaches as these, so fierce, so suddain in their breaking out, and managed with such intemperate Zeal, are certainly the way to destroy, not preserve the good Opinion the King has entertain'd of the *Dissenters*, or to deserve the Favour already shewn them.

From the Throne, and the Parliament, look without Doors, the common People are unhappily chang'd for a few Years past in their Sentiments of several Things, and among the rest, more remarkably in that Moderation and Compassion to the *Dissenters*, which they formerly practised, as well as in their Notions of Government and Obedience: The same Mob that could not easily or generally be brought in former Times into the Persecuting temper of the Government, or to joyn with the Informers or Officers to harass the *Dissenters*, and pull down their Meeting-houses, tho' the Law was on their Side, are hardly prevail'd with now to let them stand, tho' the Government and the Laws are your Protection; and tho' they are assur'd of the Gallows if they attempt it.

As you have then already lost the Common People, and Reasons of State chiefly, rather than
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Friendship or good Opinion, preserve your Interest in the Gentry and Nobility, how much are you upon your good Behaviour! and how does it behove the *Dissenters*, neither in Principle nor Practice, to lessen those Reasons of State, which, under the direction of Providence, are so essential to the Preservation of their legal Liberty.

The *Dissenters* have been represented to his Majesty as a quiet, peaceable, inoffensive People, Zealous for Religion, and dissenting meerly on Principles of Conscience, from some Things in the establish'd Discipline not essential to Salvation, and subscribing chearfully to all the doctrinal Articles of the Christian Faith with the Church of *England*, submitting to the Laws, and abhorring Compulsion and Persecution: What must the King himself think! what Notions will his Majesty entertain of the *Dissenters*, when he shall hear them charging one another with Crimes which their very Enemies did not charge them with, and shall hear one Side calling the other *Arians* and *Hereticks*, and the other recriminating upon them for Persecution and Imposition? Both the effect of a most intemperate and most unseasonable Rage, and which I do not find one among the *Dissenters*, no, not of the very Ministers who were present and concern'd in it, but condemn it, and are ready to acknowledge themselves very sorry for.

But why then is the Strife carried on? Why do ye appeal against one another in Print? Why do ye Impeach your Brethren on one Side and on the other before the Judicature of common Fame? Printing Books and Advertisements full of reproaches and recriminations, charging and

condemning one another before your Enemies? For Printing is appealing to the World. Will this end the Strife, or will it widen the Breach? Do you not in this put yourselves into the very Hands of your Enemies, and give them occasion to wound you with your own Weapons? To accuse both Sides from the Mouths of both Sides, do you not put Arms into the Hands of Enemies, Words into the Mouths of Scoffers, and Arguments into the Minds of Scepticks and Atheists? Do you not weaken the Hands that should defend you, and strengthen the Hands that would destroy you? Depend upon it, if ever the Toleration comes in question, if ever your Enemies find an occasion to attack your Liberty, these are the Weapons they will attack you with: These the Artillery they will turn against you, viz. your own Words against one another, your own Reproaches and the Scandal you rip up against one another; these will be so many Chain-shot to mow down your Defences, and answer your Pleadings even out of your own Mouths. Can any Argument clench down a Scandal upon a *Dissenter*, whether a Minister or a Hearer; whether a private Person or a Congregation, like this, That their own Friends said it of them? If you reproach your Ministers yourselves, Can you expect your Enemies will not fix that Reproach?

What dreadful Work is this, that the *Dissenters* should be throwing Dirt at one another, and the Ministers should be Inveighing against, and Exposing one another, when their Enemies are so earnestly struggling to throw Dirt at both Sides! How will these Things plead against your Toleration, if ever the Continuance of it comes to be a Question among those who have the
Power

Power to take it off! Are a Contentious disturb'd Body to be Tolerated in a Christian peaceable Nation? Remember the Argument brought by a certain Member in King *William's* Time against the *Dissenters*, when the Act of Toleration was in Debate in the House, and let me repeat a few of his Words; they were spoken with the presence of much Zeal for Religion, and, were the same Dispute to be now renew'd in Parliament, would appear to have, I fear, much more force in them, and reason with them than they had then. The Words are as follows:

Let us consider, Mr. Speaker, who they are we are about to Tolerate; They say they are Protestants: Let us first be satisfied that they are Christians. Upon my Word, Mr. Speaker, I have some Objections to bring against it, which ought to be of more weight to them, at least, than you may Imagine possible; Not, Mr. Speaker, that I want Charity, or that I do believe Dissenters are not Christians; But I can prove to you, that they do not think so of themselves, at least, Mr. Speaker, they are not agreed upon the Matter; for Example, the Presbyterians do not believe the Quakers to be Christians, the Anabaptists will not own that the Presbyterians are Christians, and the Independants, I think, will neither allow the Quakers or Anabaptists to be Christians, at least, they are all so broken and divided among themselves, that they maintain no Christian Charity for one another, no Christian Communion with one another, any more than they do with us: Now for God's sake, Mr. Speakes, let us consider well what we are going to do; I hope this House will never Tolerate any People that are not Christians: I humbly move, that all these People (for it seems we are to Tolerate all of them) may go away and reconcile their Opinions of one another together, and come again when they are agreed

agreed about it, and when they will all Vouch for one another's Christianity, and for our's also who are to Tolerate them, (for as they do not believe one another to be Christians, so neither do they believe us to be Christians of whom they ask Toleration;) then we may consider farther about it.

It was upon this Speech, and the motion made by the same Member, that all those who expected to be Tolerated, were to Sign their assent to all the Doctrinal Articles of Faith of the Church of *England*, and a Clause was inserted to make that Subscription necessary. I need not remind the *Dissenters* what Hopes some People had, that the *Dissenters* would not comply with that Subscription, any more than I need to hint what one of their Enemies has already published, *viz.* That the present Breach among the *Dissenters* will bring this Advantage to the Church, *viz.* That they will forfeit by it the Liberty they Enjoy by the Laws: [See two Pamphlets by the Author of the *Scourge*.] I most earnestly therefore recommend the Thoughts of it to all the Persons concern'd in running this dreadful Breach so high; that they would consider the Toleration, and to say no more, that they would not be the Instruments to destroy it, and deprive themselves of it with their own Hands.

Consider RELIGION.

I would not separate in this Consideration between the reformed Religion, as profess'd by the Church of *England*, or as profess'd by the *Dissenters*; because the Strife is in this Particular unhappily spread among all Sides: But I beseech you all to consider Religion in general. Does this
Dispute

Dispute tend in the Nature of it to preserve or to destroy Religion? Does it tend to give Force and Energy to the Doctrines of the Gospel, or does it not tend directly to erase all that awe and reverence due to the Word and Worship of God in the World, and to lessen the Fear of the Name, the Majesty, and Authority of God which should possess the Minds of Men? Does it not naturally tend to bring them to a dreadful Indifference in the Worship and Service of God, when their Spiritual Instructors and Guides break in among themselves about Matters of Faith and Doctrine, Things essential to Salvation, and that in so Scandalous a manner as is now the Case?

Will Ministers falling upon Ministers, and Christians upon Christians, in a furious and unprecedented manner, in Breach of all Charity and Affection, as we see now before us; I say, will this advance the Credit of Religion in the Minds of Men, or sink it to nothing? Will this add Efficacy to your Preaching, and encrease the reverence of the Hearers who sit under your Ministry? Or will it bring the Messengers of God into contempt and their Message also?

What are ye doing! when you rip up the Infirmities and mistakes of Ministers on one hand, or on the other; I say, what are ye doing, but to bid their Hearers give no heed to them, separate from them, or, which is worse, mind nothing they say!

Unhappy Dispute, or rather unhappily managed: Had it been kept within the bounds of the Walls where it began, had it been confin'd to *Salter's Hall*, tho' the Breach of Charity and the

the Sin one way had been the same ; yet the Scandal had been less, the Enemies of God and Religion had had no room to blaspheme, no room to mock at Religion in general, nor at the *Dissenters* in Particular.

As to Religion in general ; what Wounds do you make ! how do you take away the awful Impressions which the Sense of Religion has made, and ought still to make on the Minds of Men ! what room do you leave for Atheism and Scepticism to break in upon the Ruins of religious Instruction among our Youth ! when instead of confirming the Authority of Religion by the Concurrence and Harmony of the whole Scheme, the Teachers and Explainers of God's Word, and of the Oracles of Life, fall out about the most essential Points of Doctrine, and dispute Principles till they blow up even the Foundation of all Doctrine, and become a Scandal to Principle itself, as little agreeing in the Object of Worship, as they did before in the manner.

Could you hear the use that is already made of this Strife among the Enemies of serious Religion in the World ; Could you hear the Triumphs of Satan's Emissaries, and with what Exultations they Glory in your Shame ; this would certainly have some effect : Can it be now said, the *Dissenters* have not given occasion to the Enemies of God to blaspheme ; or is it not rather to be own'd, that this Strife has struck a greater Blow to the Growth and Progress of Religion in this Nation, than you will be all able to retrieve, humanly speaking, in many Ages ?

How

How have ye caused the Ways of God to be evil spoken of by your Heats and Divisions, and by carrying on those Divisions to such a length as indeed brings the Thing contended for into Contempt! How have ye by so scandalous a disagreement in the very first and principal Article of Faith, *viz.* The Union of the Godhead, and in the Doctrine of the Trinity, brought the Truths of God declar'd in his Word to be doubtful, inextricable, and past our Understanding; which, by the way, are the very Arguments that the Devil has for many Ages insisted upon, in favour of an *Infallible Interpreter* of the Scripture, which is the Essence of Popery?

Is not this the way to pull up the most early Growth of religious Principles by the Roots, and to let in Atheism and Error like an Irresistible Flood upon the World? Is it not puzzling the Minds of Men with cross Interpretations of Scripture, setting Reason and Faith together by the Ears, raising Nature up in Arms against Revelation, and Embroiling Human Understanding with the Authority of its Maker?

By this means weaker Judgment are confounded; those who totter'd in their belief of the divine Oracles before, are over-set at once; Religion is rendred a Pathless Wilderness, the Scriptures a Labyrinth, which all Men may run into, but few find their way out of: Doctrine is made doubtful, and the Word of God unintelligible, the divine Essence an unfathomable mystery, the Determination not absolutely necessa-

ry, and what is more natural than to conclude, from all this that the Enquiry is not worth while? And so Men lay the Thing call'd Religion aside, and trouble themselves no more about it.

To those who are not so willing to part with Religion, and cannot so easily shift off the Duties of it from their Minds, the Case is still perplex'd; their Spiritual Guides thus falling out among themselves, to whom shall they adhere? Who shall they cleave to? And what shall they believe? Unless every Man is suppos'd to be capable to hear, examine, determine of, and apply the Truths of the Scripture by himself; and then perhaps it would infer, that there would be no farther need of the Pulpit, or of the Altar; Christians would forsake the Assemblies, and the Gospel of Christ be confin'd wholly to private Interpretation, an Error, in itself as destructive to Religion, as the Popish whimzie of one sole Interpreter; which leads me directly to the farther Consideration I move you to, *viz.*

Consider your Ministers.

When I say, Consider your Ministers, I speak to those who are not Ministers: It is reported of the Elephants in *Africa*, where they are Numerous, that if two of the Males Quarrel and Fight, all the rest as well Male as Female will come up in two Lines, and, thrusting in between the Combatants, first separate them, and then casting themselves into two Orbs or Circles, surround them singly, and keep them there for several Days, till they are perfectly cool and have forgotten their Quarrel; I think every Congregation of
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Dissenters, if they have any Zeal for Religion or for the *Dissenter's* Interest, and any Affection for their Ministers respectively, should surround them with all the Force of Persuasion and Entreaty, and even an Affectionate Violence (I do not mean any Coercion) to prevail on them for God-sake, and for their own sakes to dip no farther into this dreadful Strife, but if possible to put a speedy and a Christian end to it? If I am ask'd how it shall be done? How they shall put an end to it, I am not at a loss to say how it may be effectually done, and so done as that it shall be rather for the Honour of the *Dissenters* that it has happen'd, at least it shall be their Praise, as it is now their Scandal, to have differ'd: But as I am speaking to the Hearers, I say, Surround your Ministers, and engage them to heal this Breach; Importune them for Peace; separate them if possible from the Men of Strife, and endeavour to prevail with them, for the Love of God and his People, to have done with it.

I turn next to the Parties themselves, and with the utmost Humility and Respect, I beg leave to say, *Consider your selves as Ministers*, the Honour of your Persons and the Dignity of your Employment: I beseech you, how should it be that the World should not pour contempt upon the Ministers of the *Dissenters*, when they are in this very Quarrel, putting all possible contempt upon one another? Was there ever a Time before like this, when the Ministers of the *Dissenters* should strive to Expose and Defame one another! Have ye not Enemies enough? Are there not Slanders enough, and Reproaches enough, heaped upon you every day? Are there not I say Enemies

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enough that watch for your Halting? *Consider yourselves as Ministers*, your Character and Office are Sacred, they are esteem'd so by Christ himself, your Great Lord and Master; what is done for these, he accepts as done for himself, and what is done against them, he resents as done against himself: But how, think you, will he resent what is done by them against one another, against the Dignity of their Office, and in effect against the Efficacy of their Ministry?

Consider farther, with what Force of Argument can you press your Hearers to Honour their Ministers as those that watch for their Souls, while in so gross a manner you are dishonouring and exposing one another? I am not here enquiring, whether the Reproaches cast out against one another be just or not; your Enemies will go no farther to Inform themselves of that part, than to your Words; 'tis enough to them that ye Charge one another, and that they can bring your own Testimonies against yourselves; 'tis enough for them, if they can blacken any Minister from the Authority of his own Brethren; when ye Charge one another with Partiality, with Injustice, want of Charity, Breach of Decency, what will your Enemies carry this to? besides the Charge upon Principles, besides the Reproaches upon your Soundness in Doctrine, when you arraign one another before the Tribunal of Men, they will condemn you as before the Tribunal of God; while you appeal against one another to the Mobs and Rabbles of your Enemy; they will appeal against you all to yourselves, and quote the Testimony of each Man's Passions against his Brother.

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What dreadful Work is this! what are ye doing! how are ye pulling down with one Hand what you build with another! and which is worse, how ye are pulling down in one Day what you, and many good Men before you, have been Building many Years! Is it for this you have been struggling so many Ages, with the Railery and Scandal cast upon you by your Enemies, that when they began rather to cease abusing the *Dissenters*, or found it fruitless to attack them, you should take the wretched Work out of their Hands, and fall upon one another!

What need, I beseech you, for your Enemies to call you Hypocrites, when you suggest of one another, that you have sign'd to what you do not believe? What need for them to call you Schismatics and Phanatics, when you call one another Hereticks and Persecutors out of your own Mouths? You will for the future be condemn'd, not out of the Writings of *Lesley* and *L'Estrange*; they will need no more to collect Phanatick blunders to expose you, they will appeal to the *Salter's-Hall-Synods*, and tell your Enemies nothing but what you have told them already, viz. That in your Anger, you have heapt up all Sorts of Scandal and Reproaches upon one another.

For your own sakes, for your Works sake, if ever you would be listen'd to in the Pulpit, or reverenc'd out of it, heal up this Breach: For the sake of God, and his Gospel, whose glorious Service you are employ'd in, Consider, and put an end to it, and restore yourselves to one another.

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If any Man say, How shall it be done? I return it with a Question, How can any Man ask how it shall be done? *MEET AGAIN, ASSEMBLE AGAIN*, and there confess your Mistakes to one another, and as you have sinn'd together, repent together, and ask Forgiveness of your Heavenly Father one for another; this is the short and the only remedy, easie, like washing in the Waters of *Jordan*, but nothing else will do the Cure. This will restore you to your People, this will restore your Characters, preserve the reverence to your Persons, and regard to your Labours; which your Hearers ought to retain, and which they would retain, and which I do not see you have any other way to recover; for, *believe it*, you have in a great measure lost them both by this wretched step.

Despise not the Advice; let the wisest Man among you tell us if there is any *better way*; nay, tell us if there is any *other way* than this: without Question you are out of God's Way; and if you can find a Blessing out of his Way, to what purpose do you teach others that they can only expect a Blessing in his Way? You must practise, or you had as good never Preach; the World is now so wise and so wicked, that they will take all Advantages of you; and if, while ye Preach up a strict exact Life to your Hearers, you make the least Excursions yourselves, they will Improve them to the discredit of all your persuasives. If you Preach Charity and Peaceable behaviour, Brotherly love and mutual Forbearance, and yet Warrings and Fightings are found among yourselves, they will not reproach you as Men only, but as Ministers.

But

But now, if, as this Offence is come ; (*I fear a Woe will be to them by whom it came*) I say, if, as this Offence is come, we should see our Ministers acting the Duties of Love and Humility one towards another, if we could hear of another Assembly at *Salters-Hall*, where our Ministers, laying aside for *that one Time* the Disputes they have differed about, had humbled themselves one to another, and ask'd Forgiveness one of another, for that Unchristian Feud they had Embark'd in, and then mutually and affectionately joyn'd with one another to beg Forgiveness of God for all together, for the manner of their Difference, and for the Offence given thereby to God and their Brethren ; let the State of their Difference stand otherwise how it would, I am sure this would remove the Scandal of their Difference ; this would restore them to one another and to their Ministry, and deliver them effectually from the Advantages their Enemies have now over them, how they will do it any other way, I confess, I do not see.

Some, I know, have suggested, that if they would let it all drop, cease appealing one another in Print, and urging one another by Letters and publick Provocations, Retorts and Reflections, this would do it ; and that if they would agree to say no more on one Side or another, the Thing would dye of Course, and be forgotten ; but this I humbly take leave to say is a mistake ; the School-men say there is one Thing that even God himself cannot do, that is, he cannot make a Thing not to have been, which once has been ; and if this be True, I must add,

add, Man cannot make a Thing of this Nature which has been, not be remember'd.

But this way it should be remember'd to your Advantage, this is the only way to bring *Meat* out of this *Eater*, *Good* out of this *Evil*; then, this that now fills our Faces with blushes, and makes us asham'd even for our Ministers, shall turn the Smiles and Triumphs of your Enemies into Blushes, and they will be asham'd for ever to mention the very name of a dissenting Minister again; I mean, in their way; and if they should, it would be to the Honour of the *Dissenters*, and to their own Confusion.

As to the Dispute itself, I continue, as I said at first, to exclude it from any share in this part; it is not the Matter of the Strife I am upon, 'tis the manner of it; I need not explain the Terms when I speak of a Difference, or lay down a History of the Facts which we complain of; they are known too well to those to whom this is directed, and 'tis known too well to your Enemies; the Number of Writings of which our Publishers of Pamphlets are full, (*for Hell and the Booksellers are the chief Gainers in the Quarrel*;) have too surely recorded it in this particular; I say therefore, I need not enter into them, the Manner of the Dispute has been as scandalous to the Persons, as the Dispute itself has been to the Principles of those concern'd. It is this scandalous part of the Breach that I am speaking of, which is at present the reproach of the *Dissenters* and of their Ministers: If some stop is not put to this, the *Dissenters* and their Interest are lost, and the very name in a few Ages will be lost in
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the World, or else God must proceed with them out of the ordinary Course of his Providence, and out of the usual Method of his Dealing with Churches in the World.

But if in some manner like what I have mention'd above, this Breach may be heal'd; if it may be so made up, that the Enemies of the *Dissenters* may be effectually silenc'd, and the Scandal be removed, it will be better than if it had never happen'd; and what way can this be but as I have propos'd? How is Scandal removed, but by Acknowledgment? Insisting upon the Question, who has been the Cause of it all, will not do, and will but add Sin to Folly; for whoever was the Cause, both have offend'd in the Effect, and nothing but a mutual return can restore them to God and one another; is there any Equivalent for an open Offence, but an open Acknowledgment? Is there any remedy for Sin, but Repentance? But this is the way to make Peace both with God and Man.

What a Disappointment would such a Heavenly healing Spirit as this be to the *Dissenter's* Enemies? To what infinite Confusion would it drive those who rejoyce now in their Calamity, and hope to *SCOURGE* them with the Rods of their own Passions?

With what infinite Advantage to the *Dissenters* would it be mentioned upon all publick Occasions, when their Liberty, their Interest, or their Character, should at any time be the Question! How would they appear to be a People worthy the Toleration they Enjoy, worthy the
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Regard of the Government, and worthy the Imitation of others !

How would it Honour the recommendation with which they were so lately Honour'd by their Sovereign ! and with what Pleasure must the King, when his Majesty shall hear of it, reflect upon his having made so right a Judgment, as that of esteeming the *Dissenters* worthy of his Favour and Protection !

Above all, How will it honour Religion, and Particularly the Protestant Religion, and more Particularly the Protestant Religion as profess'd by the *Dissenters* ! when the Ministers of the *Dissenters* appear so perfectly govern'd by the Rules they Instruct others to be Govern'd by, so sincerely practising what they Teach, and showing so excellent a Pattern in Obedience to the Command of Christ their Lord and Master, express'd fully *Matthew 5. 23, 24. If thou bringest thy Gift to the Altar, and there remembrest that thy Brother has ought against thee, leave there thy Gift upon the Altar, and go thy way ; first be reconcil'd to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy Gift.*

And how indeed, according to this Text, Can they Preach till this is done ! How can they look up to God, look into themselves, or look out to one another, while the Breach between them and their Brethren is thus unheal'd, and while they go on thus to impeach and reproach one another !

As to the fatal Dispute, *Such I call it, because it has been the Occasion of this fatal Strife, this unchristian*

stian scandalous Breach; I say, as to the fatal Dispute, the same healing returning Spirit which I now move them to, will, if rightly pursued, move them to carry it on after another manner; to pursue it, *if it must be pursued*, with another Temper, to bring it into as narrow a Compass as they can, to wait and pray for the Spirit of God, who is the best Expofitor of the Word of God, to Guide them into the Knowledge of the Truth, and where they cannot reconcile their Opinions, to bear with one another in Love, and as before, where *they must contend EARNESTLY, not to contend ANGRILY*; thus going on with a Spirit of Meekness and Brotherly Love, their Labours may still prosper, if Errors cannot be entirely suppress'd, they will yet spread the less; if Mistakes cannot be prevented, they will have the less Poyson in them, the weak Christians will not be so generally stumbled and offended; Atheism, Deism, and a Contempt of all Religion, will not be so generally Encouraged; and it may still be hop'd, that God may not be provok'd to Visit us in Judgment, or remove his Gospel from us.

F I N I S.

